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ABSTRACT

Classroom management literature emphasizes non-punitive methods of managing a classroom of students, suggesting that democratic class meetings are an important or central element to developing student character. Class meetings are presented as a method of teaching children problem solving skills, conflict resolution, and a means for encouraging character education through intrinsic motivation and self regulation in academics and behavior. This annotated bibliography presents a list of resources for teachers seeking ways to increase character education through classroom management techniques. (Contains 1 note and 19 references.) (Author/BT)

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CLASS MEETINGS ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Class Meetings as a Tool for Classroom Management and Character Development: An Annotated Bibliography

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SO 035 042

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Abstract

In searching through the literature on classroom management, one finds that many of those works that emphasize non-punitive methods of management suggest democratic class meetings as an important or even central element. Class meetings are presented as a method of teaching children problem-solving and conflict resolution, as well as a means for encouraging instrinsic motivation and self-regulation in academics and in behavior. This annotated bibliography presents a list of resources for teachers looking to implement this type of classroom management.

Gold stars, stickers, behavior pocket charts, token economies, "caught doing good" incentive programs: all the "carrots" we hold out to students to motivate them to behave cooperatively. Detention, phone calls and letters to parents, no gym, no recess, extra homework, names on the board, lost field trips: all the "sticks" we use to "beat" them when they don't. Yet how many of us teachers find that our students are *still* constantly bickering, name-calling, chasing each other around the room because of some real or imagined insult? And if this is not going on in the presence of the primary classroom teacher, how often is it unleashed as soon as another teacher takes his or her place? Could there be some technique, some process of classroom management that would actually change this picture?

According to those who have developed and implemented various programs of class meetings, there definitively is a positive answer to that question. There are a number of specific formats that have been developed for the various programs, but what they have in common is that students and teachers form a circle so that everyone can see each other; that certain routines are adhered to, and are taught to the class as part of introducing class meetings. These routines vary from program to program, but include such things as who can call a meeting or lead it, how often the meetings are held, how to open the meeting, activities for opening discussion, methods of bringing up topics for discussion or adding them to the agenda ahead of time.

Charney (2002), Glasser (1992, 1997, 2001), Kriete (1999), Nelsen, Lott & Glenn (2000), among others, have concluded that the reason class meetings are an effective way of obtaining positive behavior is because such a format meets a number of basic human needs. The most important among these needs are for belonging and for control over one's own life. Implemented according to the criteria these authors promote, class meetings provide a forum where students truly become part of a classroom community, where they have a voice in decision-making and

problem-solving, and where they are acknowledged and valued.

A number of studies have borne out this contention that class meetings promote pro-social behavior in students, leading to better adjustment, fewer behavior problems, and even better academic performance in some cases. In a paper presented to the April 2000 meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Paul Gathercoal documents the difference in social development between sixth grade students whose teachers had regularly used democratic class meetings and students in the same school and grade level whose teachers did not hold class meetings. In the study students responded to questionnaires designed to ascertain the level of social development of each student in twelve different homerooms. The stages of development were defined (from lowest to highest) as: 1. Dependence; 2. Rebellion; 3. Cohesion, and 4. Autonomy.

The September 1995 survey results provided a baseline measure, and were quite similar between the two groups: more than 40% of the students in both groups scored in the dependent stage, 13-14% in the rebellious stage, and roughly 25% in both the cohesive and the autonomous stage. By May 1996, among the students who had participated in regular class meetings, only 6% were deemed to be in the dependent and rebellious stages respectively, 14% were in the cohesive stage, and a full 75% in the autonomous stage. In contrast, those whose classes had not had class meetings rated 16% dependent, 27% rebellious, 18% cohesive and 37% autonomous. (Gathercoal, 2000)

In another example, fifth-grade teacher Shannon Potter describes how her class went from being the one other teachers complained about to the one they marveled over after just a few months of using class meetings. Potter says:

By the end of the project I noticed an increase in positive interaction among my

> students as well as a decrease in inappropriate behavior and complaints from other teachers . . . Journals revealed that students . . . were learning important interpersonal skills." She also found, through a questionnaire sent to parents, that her students' positive behavior carried over to their home life. (Potter & Davis, 2003)

The Gathercoal study was conducted in a sixth-grade-only school in Minnesota; Potter's class in Central Texas contained a majority of economically disadvantaged students who received a reduced-price or free lunches. This indicates that the benefits of class meetings apply across a variety of circumstances. The following annotated bibliography gives an overall description of three programs that use class meetings as a major element, focusing on the most important works in each program. It also describes several other works with a variety of perspectives that can serve as practical guides for using class meetings.

Annotated Bibliography

Class Meetings Programs

Positive Discipline

Positive Discipline is a readily accessible program designed to be used by individual teachers, regardless of whether or not their entire school has adopted the program. The underlying philosophy is that we make a mistake in thinking that we have to make children feel worse in order to "make" them behave better. (Nelsen, Lott & Glenn 2000, p.120) Positive Discipline is a program designed to be used in schools, day care centers and at home. The program includes a number of books, videos and workshops geared to teachers, parents and other care givers. The books are available in major bookstores, as well as through the Positive Discipline website and catalog. The works of Rudolph Dreikurs are referred to often, as well as other education philosophers such as Alfie Kohn and Alfred Adler.

Class meetings are the core strategy of Positive Discipline classroom management, and are designed to work with any age group. The literature includes anecdotes about successes at virtually every level from kindergarten to college classes. The other techniques and strategies suggested work best in conjunction with class meetings. The authors often advise that if a problem is not solved by a suggested strategy, it should be put on the class meeting agenda so that the whole class can work on a solution.

The process is described this way:

> Class meetings, as defined by Nelsen, Lott and Glenn in *Positive Discipline in the Classroom* (1997), provide a designated time (e.g., 20 to 30 minutes) during the school day when students form a circle to discuss classroom issues and problems. Class meetings provide an opportunity for students to practice using pro-social skills by making decisions and solving problems together. They also help students develop a sense of value and belonging by allowing them to share concerns, anxieties, frustrations, and celebrations. Through class meetings, students are able to express concerns and solve conflicts in a non-threatening environment. By developing solutions that are related, respectful, and reasonable, students learn skills that enable them to solve problems when they occur. The goal of class meetings is to help students learn skills they can use every day of their lives. (Browning, Davis & Resta, 2000, p.2)

Nelsen, J., Lott, L. & Glenn, H.S. (2000) *Positive discipline in the classroom: mutual respect, cooperation and responsibility in your classroom.* Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing

This book is the basic guide to the Positive Discipline Class Meetings program. It begins with an overview of the vision, shared by many educators, of a caring classroom where children feel safe and respected, where they feel a sense of belonging, and where their abilities are valued

and encouraged. The book proceeds to a step-by-step description of how to introduce the concept of class meetings, and how to teach the eight "building blocks" of effective class meetings, one at a time, until the full routine is established. These building blocks are: 1. Form a circle; 2. Practice compliments and appreciations; 3. Create an agenda; 4. Develop communication skills; 5. Learn about separate realities; 6. Recognize the four reasons people do what they do; 7. Practice role-playing and brainstorming; 8. Focus on non-punitive solutions. *(* p.60) Subsequent chapters develop these various "building block" concepts, and suggest ways to extend the benefits of class meetings to meet the needs of classroom management during the rest of the day, as well as how to build support among teachers in the school environment.

Nelsen, J. & Lott, L. (1997) *Positive discipline in the classroom: Teacher's guide.* Orem, UT: Empowering People Books, Tapes & Videos.

Subtitled "A Step-by-Step Approach to Bring Positive Discipline to the Classroom and to Help Teachers of All Grade Levels Implement Classroom Meetings," and presented in ring binder format this book is divided into five sections: The first section, "Getting Teachers Involved," gives an outline of a workshop to introduce the program to teachers. The second section, "Activities for Teachers," includes activities designed to help teachers become aware of their own attitudes and how they impact on their students' sense of empowerment in the classroom. The third section, "Activities for Use With Students," provides lesson plans for implementing class meetings and dealing with common classroom problems in a creative way (This supplements the lesson plans in *Positive Discipline in the Classroom, 2000).* The fourth section, "Teachers Helping Teachers," outlines activities for setting up a supportive network of teachers who are using Positive Discipline. The final section, "Student Assistance through Positive Discipline," deals with setting up intervention procedures for problem students.

Nelsen, J., Escobar, L., Ortolano, K., Duffy, R., & Owen-Sohocki, D. (2001) *Positive discipline: A teacher's A-Z guide*. Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing

This volume is divided into two parts. Part one, "Positive Discipline Fundamentals," gives a brief overview of many of the concepts that are laid out in more detail in Nelsen, Lott & Glenn (2000). Part two is organized in encyclopedia form, listing 86 separate classroom issues in alphabetical order from "Abuse" to "The Zoo and Other Field Trips." The list includes everything from "Whining" to "Cheating," from "Teasing" to "Substitute Teachers." Each entry is divided into "Discussion," where the issue is defined, and how it impacts a classroom is examined; "Suggestions," where ideas to address the issue are enumerated; and "Planning Ahead to prevent Future Problems," where prevention ideas are enumerated. For example, a suggestion in the "Planning Ahead to Prevent Future Problems" section of the entry on ADD and ADHD, is:

> 4. Use class meetings to discuss the different needs of each person in the class. Help the children recognize that differences exist and that they are not cause for ridicule or embarrassment. Use role playing to explore what it might feel like to be in a wheelchair or unable to hear. Develop the children's insight into the perspectives and needs of others. (P. 75)

Each alphabetical listing also has a section "Class Meeting Solutions," and/ or a section called "Inspirational Story(ies)," which relate anecdotes from teachers at various grade levels, about how they dealt with that particular issue through class meetings or one-on-one with their students.

The Positive Discipline catalog also includes several videos, and a schedule of workshops held around the country. The website address is: http://www.positivediscipline.com

Responsive Classroom

Responsive Classroom is an approach to teaching and learning that includes a class meeting every morning as an integral part of its program. Developed in 1981 by the staff of the Northeast Foundation for Children, the Responsive Classroom approach is founded on seven basic principles that revolve around the idea that social skills and interconnections between teachers, students and parents are just as important as the academic content of instruction. (Kriete, p. 4-5) As described on their website, the Responsive Classroom approach also includes teaching strategies such as guided discovery and giving students meaningful choices in their learning, which helps them become invested, self-motivated learners.

Kriete, R. (1999) *The Morning Meeting Book*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children

This is the book that delineates the purpose and procedure for Morning Meetings, the start of the day for the Responsive Classroom approach. The purposes of Morning Meeting are described as five-fold: 1. It sets the tone for respectful learning and establishes a climate of trust. 2. This tone extends beyond the Meeting. 3. It motivates children by addressing two needs: for a sense of belonging and for having fun. 4. The repetition of many ordinary moments of respectful interaction in the Morning Meeting enables some extraordinary moments. 5. It merges social, emotional and intellectual learning. (p.9-10)

Morning Meetings as developed for the Responsive Classroom program consist of four sequential parts that together last about 30 minutes. First is *Greeting*, where children greet each other by name, often including handshaking, clapping, or other activities to enhance the acknowledgment of each student. In *Sharing*, a few students each day share some news of interest to the class and take questions and comments from classmates. *Group Activity* consists of a short,

whole class activity designed to build class cohesion. It could be a game, a song, or some other routine that joins learning with fun. *News and Announcements* is the final part, where students develop language skills and learn about events of the day ahead by reading and discussing a daily message posted for them, which sometimes they have been asked to interact with ahead of time. (p.3)

Charney, R. (2002)*Teaching Children to Care: Classroom management for ethical and academic growth, K-8.* Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children

Ruth Charney's book, first published in 1992, is one of the core works used in the Responsive Classroom approach. Where *The Morning Meeting Book* concentrates on that element of Responsive Classroom, Charny's book deals with many other aspects of classroom management, including other types of class meetings that may be used to solve problems or discuss other pressing issues. These various types of class meetings help children learn how to care for themselves, their fellow students, their environment, and their work. The book includes information on teaching middle-school students, strategies for helping children with particularly challenging behavior and updated stories and examples from real classrooms.

Denton, P. & Kriete, R (2002) *The first six weeks of school.* Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children

The early weeks of each new school year are critical. This is when expectations and routines are established, rules are generated, goals are articulated, and the foundation is laid for the year ahead. This is the time when the format of Morning Meeting is taught to the students, from day one, and the routine is established. Four broad aims of the first six weeks' curriculum are defined as: 1.Create a climate and tone of warmth and safety. 2.Teach the schedule and

routines of the school day and our expectations for behavior in each of them. 3.Introduce students to the physical environment and the materials of the classroom and the school, and teach students how to use and care for the materials and environment. 4.Establish expectations about ways we will learn together in the year ahead.(p.3-4) Class meetings figure into many of these aims, and are described for various class levels from kindergarten to grade six. Denton and Kriete also include a closing circle for each day.

Responsive Classroom offers workshops, training programs, videos, a quarterly newsletter and many other books. They can be reached at http://www.responsiveclassroom.org,

Glasser Quality School

William Glasser, M.D., head of the William Glasser Institute, has developed a program called "The Glasser Quality School," mainly aimed at whole schools or school systems, but elements can be implemented by classroom teachers outside of a "Quality School" situation. Glasser bases his program on the management theory of William Deming, who wrote for a business audience. It's based on the superiority of "lead management" over "boss management." Some of the elements of a Glasser Quality School program are the elimination of the ABCDF grading system in favor of a system he calls Competence Based Classroom, or CBC. This means that a student either produces competent work, the equivalent of a "B" grade, or he/she receives an "incomplete."

Other aspects of the Quality School program are informed by choice theory, which Glasser developed in his work as a psychiatrist. It states that all people, children as well as adults, choose behaviors through which they attempt to satisfy five basic needs: survival, love and belonging,

power, freedom and fun. The most important of these is the need for love and belonging, since being connected with those around us is a prerequisite for satisfying the other needs. Class meetings provide a practical way to serve this need for belonging while at the same time fulfilling other needs as well, depending on the specific purpose of the meeting.

Glasser, W. (2001) *Every student can succeed.* Chatsworth, CA: William Glasser, Inc.

This is the most useful of the Glasser books for the teacher who is not in a Quality School setting. ThIS book deals with a range of topics: the importance of good relationships in teaching (p.1-13); problems inherent in the ABCDF grading system (p.15-22); non-external control methods for dealing with problem students (p.23-42); the importance of competence-based education, with many ideas for implementing this concept in different subjects and grade levels. (p. 43-115) It is in the section on competence-based education that class meetings are described. A passage on introducing class meetings (referred to as "circle-ups") to the students states:

> As soon as it seems appropriate, introduce them to the idea of circle-ups. You've already set up the circle by involving the whole class in a discussion. Now use it to help solve a personal, class or school problem. . . . There isn't a problem that can't be solved if you get them to circle-up frequently . . . . Perhaps the real power of circle-ups is not to talk very much about problems but to prevent them by talking about anything that's interesting. That's what gets them all connected before there is any trouble. (p.60)

Glasser, W. (1998) *The quality school teacher.* New York, NY: Harper Perennial

This is the original handbook for teachers trying to implement the lead-management ideas of The Quality School in their classrooms, whether working in a Glasser Quality School or not.

Glasser gives very specific suggestions for the use of class meetings to teach Choice Theory to students as a way of enabling them to see how their own choice is involved in their behavior. Glasser gives an example of using a fight between students as a teachable opportunity. He outlines a series of class meetings designed to help the students understand that they do actually choose their behavior, even when their first impression is that something or someone else "made" them react a certain way. (p.102-112)

Glasser, W. (1998) *The quality school: Managing students without coercion.* New York, NY: Harper Perennial

This is the book where Glasser lays out his vision of schools where lead management has supplanted boss management, where students participate in regular class meetings, where they learn the material or receive an incomplete grade. Failure is not recognized. He describes four phases that a school needs to go through before it can become a Glasser Quality School. That process includes whole-staff discussions that deal with the theories of lead-management and choice theory, and their application to the particular school.[1]

The Glasser Institute is available at http://www.wglasser.com

Other Class Meeting Resources

Gathercoal, F. (1993) *Judicious discipline*. San Francisco, CA: Caddo Gap Press

Judicious Discipline builds a system of classroom management and instruction on the concept of individual rights balanced against compelling state interests. In the United States everyone, including teachers and students, has individual rights based on the U.S. Constitution, particularly the Bill of Rights. These rights must be respected by all governmental bodies in this

country, and may be restricted only when "compelling state interests," mandate such restriction. In other words, government bodies must show that there is a serious reason, based on the welfare needs and interests of the larger society, for restricting individual rights.

In a Judicious Discipline classroom, this concept of constitutional rights balanced against the needs of society is taught to the students as a practical everyday code of ethics, not just an academic study. In this setting, class meetings are important because they create among the students a sense of enfranchisement, based on the First Amendment right " . . . of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." (p.98) Some of the purposes suggested for class meetings are: to revisit and reconsider rules decided on at the beginning of the year; to discuss classroom ethics, or student misbehavior, or just to have the opportunity for all members of the classroom community to voice their opinion on topics in the news or in the curriculum. Class meetings are suggested as a forum in which to carry out the tasks of building a democratic classroom with this code of ethics.

The Judicious Discipline approach is designed for use in kindergarten through 12th grade classes. Even though it would seem that the legal concepts would not be understood by the youngest students, the materials suggest how to introduce the concepts early in ways that are understandable, and to build on that understanding in subsequent years.

Landau, B.M. & Gathercoal, P. (2000) Creating peaceful classrooms. *Phi Delta Kappan, 81.* 450-453

In this article the authors present a very concise description of the Judicious Discipline approach, and maintain that "when the language of citizenship rights and responsibilities is used to

mediate problems, students and teachers can use personally neutral, socially accepted terminology for peaceful conflict resolution."(p. 2) They include a recommended structure and guidelines for democratic class meetings. They also cite a number of studies that have demonstrated the effectiveness of the Judicious Discipline approach in increasing the social development of students, and in helping them set goals and determine for themselves how they will attain the goals.

Additional materials on Judicious Discipline can be obtained from http://www.caddogappress.com or http://www.dock.net/gathercoal/judicious_discipline.html

Child Development Project (1996) *Ways we want our class to be: Class meetings that build commitment to kindness and learning.* Oakland, CA: Developmental Studies Center

This practical guide addresses why, when, and how to use class meetings in grade levels K to six, to build a caring classroom community and address the academic and social issues that arise in the daily life of the elementary school classroom. It is a well-organized resource that includes practical strategies for meetings serving different kinds of purposes, such as planning meetings, check-in meetings and problem solving meetings. Specific meetings depicted in the book include these examples: choosing a class name to build identity, planning Parents' Open House Night, planning for a substitute teacher, setting goals, helping children meet their goals, and discussing cliques and exclusion. In addition to tips on getting started, ground rules, and facilitating the meetings, 14 guidelines for specific class meetings are included.

Additional resources of the Child Development Project are available at: http://www.devstu.org/cdp/csc

Styles, D. (2001) *Class Meetings: Building Leadership, Problem-Solving and Decision- Making Skills in the Respectful Classroom.* Markham, ON: Pembroke Publishing

Patterned after family meetings in her own home, teacher Donna Styles established a format for class meetings that enabled her students to share their thoughts and solve classroom issues on their own. In Styles's model, students take turns acting as a discussion leader, while the teacher promotes a respectful atmosphere and participates as a group member. Her main suggestions for successful class meetings are these: 1.Use a formal process, and hold meetings every week. 2.Use a circle formation, with members sitting in chairs. 3. Model respectful behavior. 4. Create a positive classroom environment. 5. Do not dominate meetings. 6. Have faith in the creative problem-solving process. 7. Trust the ability of your students to lead meetings, participate in discussions, choose solutions, and make decisions that will affect the classroom. (Bafile, C., 2002)

Lickona, T. (1992) *Education for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility.* New York: Bantam Books

This is a book of close to 500 pages, dealing with many aspects and issues in character education. One whole chapter is devoted to "Creating a democratic classroom environment: The class meeting"(p.135-160) In this chapter, along with some inspiring anecdotes from real classrooms, Lickona develops ten steps for a class meeting. These are: circle up, set the agenda, set the rules, identify discussion partners, pose the problem or question, personal thinking time, partner talk, signal for quiet, whole-group discussion, and closure (he suggests ten different ways to close the meeting).

There are many other references to class meetings throughout the book. The author suggests their use as a way of developing a feeling of membership (p. 102), and as a forum for discussing classroom rules and consequences. (p.113) There is a detailed discussion on using role-plays during a class meeting as a method of teaching children conflict-resolution skills and of solving particular conflicts that occur in the classroom. (P.292-293) These suggestions are all offered in the context of a focus on teaching "the fourth and fifth Rs," respect and responsibility.

Additional books and resources on this approach can be found at:

http://www.cortland.edu/c4n5rs

Conclusion

One premise underlying all these different approaches, with their varied formats, purposes and activities, is a belief that the social and emotional development of the child is just as important as academic achievement. The internalization of pro-social character traits depends on this social and emotional development. In spite of the escalating emphasis in political circles on raising standards as measured by high-stakes testing, business leaders continue to ask for educated workers who can work well with other people. There is also increasing demand from business, government and community leaders for education in positive values and character development.

Democratic class meetings address these two demands bacause they provide a forum in which students are actively engaged in listening to each other, respecting each other's differences, and understanding each other's points of view. Marilyn Watson, Director of Progrmas at the Developmental Studies Center in California has pointed out:

When we simply tell children how they must behave, rewarding their good behavior

> and punishing their bad, we fail to build their genuine understanding of moral concepts (such as fairness, reciprocity, responsibility, and so on) that can guide their behavior when they encounter new situations to which these values might apply. (Watson, 1998)

Class meetings allow children to practice these concepts in an everyday setting by providing opportunities for children to formulate ideas and present them before a group, to discuss alternative ideas and accept compromises, and to re-work plans when they don't turn out as envisioned. These skills are useful in school, at home, in the workplace, and in a democratic society in general. This annotated bibleography should help teachers identify resources that will guide them in implementing a class meeting strategy in their classrooms.

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Endnote

1 This book does not mention class meetings; it is included in this bibleography because of its integral relationship with the rest of Dr. Glasser's work on schools.

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